

The Briefing



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This, then, is how you could pray

[Anonymous \(http://matthiasmedia.com/briefing/authors/anonymous/\)](http://matthiasmedia.com/briefing/authors/anonymous/) | 15 April, 2013

Dear son,

After you said you feel unable to lead in our family prayers, I wanted to put down some thoughts about leading in prayer that will, I hope, be helpful. While they're nothing particularly profound, here they are.

It's important to remember that the primary 'audience' of prayer is God, not the group members. We all want to do a good job of leading in prayer, but ultimately it is no good to be trying to impress. The main thing is sincerity in prayer, and if the group members are worth impressing, they'll be more impressed with sincerity than with eloquence.

Given that important first step, here are some tips for praying out aloud in front of people. You don't need to have the entire prayer formulated in your head before you open your mouth. In fact, that just makes it harder because you're trying to remember the next thing you had planned as you are speaking. But at the other end of the spectrum, if you just try to say things as they come to mind you are likely to be incoherent and ramble, or quickly lose your train of thought.

I reckon the best way to lead in prayer is to have a basic model in your head—a template—that you just follow each time. (I actually think this is partly what the Lord's Prayer is.) For example: address God, give thanks, make requests, and conclude.

1. Addressing God

It's obvious, I know, but we generally start by addressing the prayer to God. At its simplest, this might just be "Dear God" or "Dear Father". (Generally speaking, we address our prayers to the Father, rather than the Son or Spirit. It's okay to do otherwise, but not the Bible's normal pattern.) But it can be more than those two words. You can praise God—and remind those praying with you—by adding an adjective or two describing God's character: "Dear loving heavenly Father", or "Lord God", or "Our gracious Father, lord of heaven and earth".

Everyone tends to have their favourite ways of kicking off a prayer. Just work out a few you feel comfortable saying.

2. Thanking God

Praying basically means asking God for things. But it's often good to not just jump straight into the prayer part, but to highlight some truth about God that relates to what you are going to pray for. Again, this is partly to praise and thank God, but also to remind those you are with about that truth.

For example, you might be about to pray for someone who is sick. Instead of launching straight in to asking for someone to get better, you might pause to recognize that God is sovereign, even over sickness, and that he cares for us:

"Thank you that nothing is beyond your control, and thank you that you love and care for us. Please be with X and help him to remember that. And would you please help him to get over his sickness?"

Or say you want to pray for a missionary: perhaps you could link a truth about God to the prayer point:

"Thank you God that you have given us such a great message to take to our world, the good news about Jesus. Thank you that you are at work in our world changing people by your Holy Spirit. Tonight we pray for your work in Cambodia, and we particularly want to ask you to help Dave and Leonie as they take the good news to that country. We pray that..."

3. Praying

Here we're already moving into the actual prayer request. First, know what it is you actually want to pray. Sometimes you'll know very specifically: "for Ben's in-grown toenail to get better". Sometimes you won't: "give them what they need". But whether it is general or specific, you need to say it. Some of the hints below will help you to know how to say it.

There are two broad categories you could use to think about this: things God has explicitly promised to give, and everything else. If you're praying for something God has promised to give, then just ask for it. As you do, you might like to express that God has promised it—for example, “You promise in James that when we ask for wisdom you will give it to us, and so we ask now that you will give wisdom to...”

For everything else, as you ask acknowledge that God knows more than you do. As you're into computer programming, think of it as a logical if-then-else clause. The ‘if’ statement acknowledges that we don't know what God wills, for example: “If it's your will that X should be healed of her cancer, we pray please that you might do it and do it soon”. But continue with the ‘else’ statement: “but whether or not you heal her, Lord, we ask that you would help her to keep trusting in your love and goodness”.

As they say, a short prayer is a good prayer. Ecclesiastes says much the same:

“Do not be quick with your mouth, do not be hasty in your heart to utter anything before God. God is in heaven and you are on earth, so let your words be few.” ([Eccl 5:2, NIV \(https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Eccles%205.2\)](https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Eccles%205.2))

So—particularly when you maybe lack a bit of confidence and experience in leading in prayer—just stick to one main prayer point. Say it well, and then finish. If you want to extend it, you have to learn ways of linking from one prayer point to another. But this takes more practice.

4. Concluding

At the very least, you need to let people know that you are finishing your prayer by saying something that sounds like it is concluding. But more than that, the final bit of your prayer is another opportunity to praise and thank God for some facet of his character, or to thank him for hearing, or to remind us that it is only “in Jesus' name” that we can pray in the first place. A simple conclusion might be like this:

“Thank you for hearing our prayer, and we commit it to you in Jesus' name. Amen.”

Or something a bit broader in its content:

“Thank you Father that we can pray to you, our loving Father, who loves to give good gifts to his children. And thank you that we can trust you to answer our prayer in your great wisdom and care. And it's in Jesus' great name that we pray. Amen.”

Again, most people have worked out their standard conclusions to their prayers. Work one or two out, and just use them. Nobody's going to say: “Oh, it's so bad; he always ends his prayers the same way.”

Leading in prayer is a great way of serving other people. There's a significant proportion of the Christian community that feel very nervous about leading in prayer, even just in a small group, let alone in a bigger group like a church service. For many people it's a combination of feeling like they don't know what to pray (because they haven't been well taught in the Bible and theology) and just a shyness about speaking in public and people all listening to them (with the fear that they will say something that will be embarrassing). For people like us, who, although on the introvert end of the spectrum, have been well-taught and have seen prayer modelled at home and in our fellowships, and who are reasonably educated, it's important that we show a bit of courage and do what maybe doesn't come all that naturally to us—because it helps other people. It is showing self-sacrificial love. Preparation and practice helps this to get easier and easier to do. So I want to encourage you to step out of your comfort zone and get into it.

The other reason to do so is that, if you ever get married, it is a man's role to take the lead in prayer in the family. (I admit this is hard, and I fail badly at it.) Developing confidence early in life to lead in prayer will make that big family responsibility just that bit easier. It becomes about battling sinfulness, not sinfulness *plus* lack of confidence.

As I said, none of this is particularly profound, but I hope (and pray) it's useful.

Love,

Dad.

Comments are closed.